DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 597 CS 215 607

AUTHOR Daniel, Janice Barnes
TITLE Connecting Higher Education to Public Schooling: Resistance to Reform.
PUB DATE Mar 96
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (47th, Milwaukee, WI, March 27-30, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College School Cooperation; Critical Thinking; *Curriculum Development; *Educational Change; *Educational Cooperation; Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Inservice Teacher Education; Professional Development; *Public Schools; Resistance to Change; *Writing Across the Curriculum
IDENTIFIERS *Morehead State University KY; *Thinking across the Curriculum

ABSTRACT

America's Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley believes that the higher education community must be in a position to respond to raised standards for kindergarten through 12th-grade students. In fact, he said: "These two systems must collaborate to solve a problem that neither can address by itself." Initially, sweeping reform plans did not include higher education and roles of universities were given no place in the overall design. However, some forward-thinking individuals at Kentucky's Morehead State University (MSU) had foreseen the need for redefining attention to the writing and thinking skills of all students and committed to a Title III 3-year project initiating professional development to increase awareness and activation of teaching writing and reasoning skills across the curriculum. A Critical Thinking task force was formed, resulting in MSU's Critical Thinking Center, and a new course (MSU 101) was implemented to foster successful orientation to campus life to smooth the transition between public schooling and higher education. A Clearinghouse for School Services coordinates integration of all school reform and inservice education, and implements professional development activities for teacher education faculty. The Morehead Writing Project offers help and information on integrating writing into the curriculum. There is a full-time outreach coordinator, and mini-grants are available which allow MSU faculty to go to public schools in the Volunteer Writing Coaches Project. (Contains 7 references.) (CR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 402 597

Connecting Higher Education to Public Schooling:

Resistance to Reform

Janice Barnes Daniel
Morehead State University
Morehead, Kentucky

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Daniel

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS215607

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Connecting Higher Education to Public Schooling:

Resistance to Reform

Once more, we should emphasize that Morehead State University is a regional institution that not only serves students from a KERA background but also provides the crucial educational needs for future teachers, administrators, supervisors, and counselors to succeed in that environment. In this cyclical mode, MSU finds itself in a position that necessitates creating educational relationships between higher education and the state's public school system. Speakers One and Two have addressed the focus on our writing program which strives to provide continuity for students coming from the KERA experience. The pedagogy that has been embraced by our public schools and by our own writing program, however, has to be seriously considered by an entire campus community whose commitment it is to prepare our future teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to return to classrooms throughout the state. Our position is no different than that of many other states represented at this conference and perhaps in this session, and we all should heed the advice of U. S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley: "As states across the country raise standards for their K-12 students, the higher-education community must be in a position to respond with their own higher standards. These two systems must collaborate to solve a problem that neither can address by itself" (Sommerfield 7).

Unfortunately, progress in our state and on our campus has been slow--and in some cases, tedious--in providing this

collaboration. In the words of Katie Haycock in a speech to Kentucky educators, "There is clearly a growing anger among K-12 people over what they perceive as higher education's being out to lunch, away from the [reform] table" (Pitsch 3). The climate of reform at Morehead State probably reflects the attitudes and responses on our sister state campuses, but Speaker Three will elaborate on specific actions and reactions only at our University. Not surprisingly, in addition to some positive acceptance of the importance of reform, we have also had to contend with resistance in forms of an undercurrent of apathy, poor faculty involvement and support, and even critical response to the need for change.

Perhaps one crucial point that should be made at the beginning is that sweeping reform plans did not initially include higher education. When our legislature mandated KERA in 1990, it passed a resolution that called on public universities to upgrade, more of a suggestion with no real threat of loss of financial support (Pitsch 8). Roles of universities were given no place in the overall design; professional development and involvement was ignored; and funding was not considered. Therefore, connections were not made. Nonetheless, scattered self-imposed efforts have been made at Morehead State University to bring attention to the significance of university involvement in state-wide reform concepts.

A few forward-thinking individuals on our campus, for example, had previously foreseen the need for redefining our attention to the writing and thinking skills of <u>all</u> of our

students, and several years prior to the existence of KERA much time was spent on grant writing and attendance at critical-thinking conferences throughout the nation. This vision eventually led to a Title III three-year project which initiated professional development endeavors on our campus to increase awareness and activation of teaching writing and reasoning skills across the curriculum. Many of our faculty committed themselves and their classes to this three-year project; national figures in the field attended our workshops; and participants were responsible for disseminating information through their respective departments. In theory and in initial application, the goals of the project were met, but a somewhat weak link was a neglect to focus on long-term attention; without practical applications of accountability, many participants fell by the wayside in continuing their commitment. For example, at one follow-up meeting where a dozen faculty were "encouraged" to attend, one lone soul responded.

On the positive side, the President approved funding for a Critical Thinking task force, which resulted in MSU's Critical Thinking Center, a component that now forms links with KERA initiatives, facilitates workshops, and distributes generic information across the curriculum. Another positive offshoot of these accomplishments was the implementation of a new course, MSU 101, that has since become a requirement for all freshmen, with the intent to foster their successful orientation to all facets of campus life--smoothing the transition between public schooling

and higher education, and hopefully assuring increased retention.

Of course, by the time these visions took shape, KERA had also become a reality, and while many of us remained unaware of the importance of making similar connections, many others could see the positive benefits of programs already in place. We were pleased that critical thinking skills directly meshed with KERA objectives, but, at the same time, we realized the need for more to be done.

One major step in enhancing relations between the University and local school districts was the formation of the Clearinghouse for School Services, which coordinates and monitors our campus's KERA support activities. The primary purposes for the Clearinghouse are to integrate all school reform and inservice education and to identify, design, implement, and assess professional development activities for teacher education faculty. This component works to form a liaison which provides and promotes partnerships between our University and our regional school systems. It provides opportunities for faculty members to be parts of teams having direct interaction with faculty and administration in these systems, it accumulates data in order to facilitate effective instruction and to reassess the ineffective, and it fosters activities that cover diverse topics ranging from effective classroom practices, to curriculum concepts, to assessment of student outcomes.

Our Clearinghouse reports that during the 1994-95 academic year, MSU served over 3,000 clients in fifty-plus KERA-related

activities, involving all four of the University's colleges and twelve academic departments with faculty members representing a wide variety of disciplines. Activities were held on our campus, at public school sites in the service region, and at other locations in the state. Some examples of these included seminars, workshops, presentations, and projects, and focused on a wide variety of topics such as networking among middle school math teachers, language arts for K-4, high school restructuring, and managing stress during change and reform.

Unfortunately, some of the stress has resulted from differences of opinion on the relevance of reform for higher education and on the question of who should be responsible. As faculty across campus become aware of efforts in teacher education, many feel no need for involvement in endeavors that they deem appropriate only to their education colleagues, but John I. Goodlad reminds us that "To leave teacher education to the collective goodwill of the arts and sciences, the college of education, and the school . . . just ensures its continued ill health" (Watkins A18). Others admit that they would receive suggestions more positively if efforts at communication were worded in a more forthright manner rather then in "education-ese." Or they wonder as do their colleagues across the country "how the results of a particular project with a school or school district will get published or fit into their tenure review" (Stewart 19). Or they fall into the large category across higher education's academe who want little interaction with K-12:

> Their courses are often taught irrespective of school needs and realities. The research that's done often does not inform practice. Practices do not seem to determine research. The textbooks they write embrace static bodies of knowledge and are marketed for mass appeal, not to address reform needs. (King 22)

On the other hand, many at MSU see that networking and capacity building must become a top priority of educators on all levels, from primary entry to college exit. In other words, the P-12 idea (primary through high school) is rapidly becoming a P-16 concept, and the Clearinghouse for School Services attempts to be a catalyst in developing partnerships and in collaborating to achieve this vision.

Another major component in collaboration is the Morehead Writing Project, one of seven national writing project sites in our state and funded by grants from the Kentucky Writing Project and the National Writing Project. This office is available for help and information on integrating writing into the curriculum, formulating course objectives, teaching methodology, and computer-assisted instruction. Seeking to combine the efforts of strong practitioners and strong researchers, the MWP serves several hundred teachers through various writing project activities, including an annual summer institute writing workshop held on our campus, coordinated by members of our faculty and attracting public school teachers from across the state.

A recent outreach grant from the State provided the MWP with a full-time Outreach Coordinator whose office is housed on the University campus and whose responsibilities include serving as our region's writing portfolio coordinator, holding membership on Kentucky Department of Education's writing advisory committee, and providing consulting and modeling in classrooms to districts in the MSU service area and to interested departments or faculty at the University. With such expertise at our fingertips, one would expect the University to welcome and to embrace opportunities for utilizing this valuable resource person, but such has not been the case. She has had very little interaction with university faculty outside the Department of Education. The University has practically failed to acknowledge her presence, other than to provide office space. There has been very little effort to make faculty aware of her services; she has been almost solely responsible for initiating contact with faculty--without the endorsement of an administration which could validate her usefulness. She is not on the University's mailing list, has no listing in the campus directory, and is not provided with a long distance code--omissions which may seem trivial but which speak volumes for an administratively indifferent attitude instead of a supportive stance for encouraging collaboration.

Also housed rent-free on our campus is the Region 7 Service Center, one of eight of its kind in the state, an "arm" of the Kentucky Department of Education which serves as a vehicle of communication and interaction between the field and that

department. A typical Service Center serves 5,000 teachers, 25 school districts, 150 schools, and 2 or more universities. In our case, the University is part of the database from which the Center develops and disseminates information. Its staff works closely with the University to maximize effectiveness in delivering assistance to school districts as they plan, develop, and implement programs and strategies aimed at achieving KERA goals. While "sharing" geographical space, the Service Center and MSU also share human resources, materials, and information as they facilitate collaborative meetings, networking, grant work, and teacher education reform. One specific result of mini-grants that are offered to University faculty who wish to reach out into the public schools to make connections is the Volunteer Writing Coaches Project, involving MSU English faculty in conferencing one-on-one with students in local schools as they prepare portfolios. Working together in these ways has built special relationships among educators and administrators at all levels and has minimized some attitudinal differences; building rapport among themselves, they return to their individual campuses to create awareness and understanding among their colleagues. A difficulty with this "ripple effect" is that the awareness is accepted readily by some, especially in education, and rejected by others who are unwilling to see change as necessary for their particular disciplines and unable to get beyond the idea that this responsibility belongs only to the Education Department.

Indeed, "awareness" has become a significant catalyst in certain changes being made in programs at the University. When KERA was first implemented, for example, our student teachers who were fulfilling their internship semesters found themselves placed in compromising situations. They were expected to adapt their pedagogy to KERA expectations in the public classrooms, but their training in higher education classrooms had not prepared them for this new methodology. Struggling to adjust in order to be successful in the eyes of their KERA students and their KERA supervising teachers, they would then feel compelled to revert to former strategies when visited by their University supervisors who had not yet had the opportunity to understand the changes taking place. It soon became quite apparent that the University needed to be more aware of preparing its future teachers to perform more effectively within KERA guidelines. As a result, our Department of Education is now involved in a massive effort to update our teacher education curriculum.

Interestingly, this Teacher Education Transformation is a result of legislative mandate rather than the court-mandated KERA. In order for our University to retain continuing accreditation, our graduates must pass certain exit criteria established both by NCATE and the Kentucky Professional Standards Board. Consequently, in 1993, when new criteria was implemented for preparation and certification of teachers throughout the state, we received directives from the State Department that changes were needed in curriculum and in methodology to ensure

that our programs and our graduates embrace and measure up to these New Teacher Standards. Suddenly, an already overloaded administration and faculty has had to assume added responsibilities on task forces, coordinating committees, and sub-committees to facilitate these measures.

A crucial concern that has emerged, quite naturally, is that University faculty, especially in Education, should also be accountable for implementing and modeling these new standards to their own students. Therefore, faculty are being asked to evaluate individual classes for the purpose of identifying and addressing needs for updating conceptual framework (knowledge base), methodology, and assessment. This realistic process has met with some amount of resistance from faculty who believe that they (and the University) are being "KERA-tized"--being forced to implement re-thinking of pedagogy when they have not thoroughly embraced the idea of reform, or have been opposed to KERA from its beginning, or consider it just another trend. "Given the history of failed projects and the danger of increasing the cynicism of overburdened and underfunded educators at all levels, many in higher education will ask . . . 'Why bother?'" (Steward 19). Some faculty feel that academic freedom is threatened, failing to realize that requiring changes in course descriptions, for example, does not force an abdication of individual approaches but merely ensures that current pedagogy is reflecting New Teacher Standards and departmental expectations. Most of the resistance has been from teachers of content courses who feel

that the goals of knowledge-based curriculum should not be thrust into alignment with those of methods courses; this segment of the faculty reflects a distinct difference of opinion with KERA theory--that adults learn differently from younger students and that new theories might not necessarily be effective in content courses. In fact, one faculty member was instrumental in heating up the Faculty Senate's discussion of rhetoric about teaching methodology proposed by general education's Committee for Curriculum Reform. Not convinced by the data against lecturing, this stance posits that a good teacher can build an effective knowledge base by continuing traditional practices.

Clearly, the lines of division seem to form between tradition and change, and one university's slow pace toward reform is consistent with higher education's longstanding historical resistance to change, mirroring earlier examples of reluctance to embrace the G.I. Bill and the civil-rights movement (Pitsch 3). P. Michael Timpane offers several reasons why higher education may be especially sluggish in reacting to public school reform. He points to the cultural gap between K-12 and higher education--marked by intellectual differences, male/female professions, high/low-prestige occupations, or advanced inquiry rather than practical pedagogy. He reminds us of higher education's other critical concerns such as budget crunches, adaptation to new technologies, needs for minority students, recruitment and retention, and demands for multicultural programs. "Given such conditions, higher education has been

utterly distracted by its own problems" and "In the course of education reform during the past dozen years, higher education has been, for the most part, a minor player and a missing voice" (18). Even in light of positive efforts, like the ones at MSU, some critics offer that "these marginal efforts mask the lack of systematic, university-wide involvement with the feeder system to their institutions" (Pitsch 8). Still others, like Andrew Harnack, insist on challenging the "assumption that schools, colleges, and the work place should become one seamless system--decontextualized, ahistorical, universalistic" (6).

If our university has yet to implement university-wide focus on claiming a seat at the reform table, our attempts at imposing self-reform do seem more positive than negative. Those of us who are committed to productive change have seen that KERA is an authentic movement rather than a trend, that research validates the new methodology and assessment, and that our programs are not compromised if our students are the true beneficiaries. At least we are no longer in denial about the need for reform, and we readily agree with Marc Tucker's belief that a "new system will be developed in bits and pieces--with the encouragement and participation of higher education, with neutrality on the part of higher education, or with the active opposition of higher education" (Pitsch 11). Dealing with all three reactions here at Morehead State University, we realize that <u>real</u> reform changes us, our students, our programs, and our educational system in the entire state. Perhaps the most crucial new catch-word that we

are fond of supporting is "co-reform," indicating an acceptance of true partnership between higher education and public schooling in improving educational opportunities for all students in all of Kentucky.

Works Cited

Harnack, Andrew. "The Impact of Kentucky's Educational Reform Act on Writing throughout the Commonwealth." Composition Chronicle Dec. 1994: 4-7.

King, D. Thomas. " `We Strive for a Seamless, Continued, Meaningful Learning.'" Education Week 13 Apr. 1994: 22.

Pitsch, Mark. "Alliance for Learning." Education Week 13 Apr. 1994: 3-11.

Sommerfield, Meg. "K-12-Style Restructuring Is Urged for Higher Ed.'" Education Week 8 Dec. 1993: 1-7.

Stewart, Donald M. " `Partnerships Have Never Seemed So Crucial to Reform.'" Education Week 13 Apr. 1994: 19.

Timpane, P. Michael. " `Higher Education's Help Has Been Badly Needed.'" Education Week 13 Apr. 1994: 18.

Watkins, Beverly T. "A Major Overhaul of Teacher Studies Urged in Report." The Chronicle of Higher Education 17 Oct. 1990: A17-18.